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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - BOSNIAN-SERB GENERALS MEET WITH DODIK

Classified By: DCM Judith Cefkin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) Summary. Chief of the Joint Staff Lieutenant General Sifet Podzic informed us that Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Milorad Dodik met with Deputy Defense Minister Igor Crnadak and all the Bosnian-Serb general officers October 26 in Banja Luka. Podzic said such a meeting was highly unusual and disconcerting considering the current political crisis. Minister of Defense Selmo Cikotic told us that he had authorized Crnadak and one of the generals to attend the meeting, but was unaware all the Bosnian-Serb generals were also present. Crnadak claims that the meeting was scheduled two weeks ago to discuss defense reform, particularly defense property. Crnadak sought to assure us that nothing was amiss despite the fact that Dodik is locked in a confrontation with the international community and has publicly addressed calls for the RS to withdraw its support for the Armed Forces. We cannot be certain why the meeting was held or what was said. The timing and participants list are unsettling, however. End Summary.

Podzic: Dodik-Generals Meeting Disconcerting

12. (S) Chief of the Joint Staff Lieutenant General Sifet Podzic asked to meet with us October 26 to discuss what he considered a disconcerting development given the current political crisis. Podzic told us that all four of the Bosnian-Serb General Officers in the Bosnian Armed Forces (Major General Miladin Milojcic, Major General Dragan Vukovic, Brigadier General Mirko Tepsic, and Brigadier General Stamenko Novakovic) and Deputy Minister of Defense Igor Crnadak met Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik in Banja Luka today (October 26). Podzic, who had been attending a military conference in Norway all week, said that he would never have granted permission for the generals to meet Dodik considering the political climate here, but Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic had authorized the meeting in Podzic's absence. Podzic also informed us that Vukovic had called this morning to inform him that Dodik had invited him to the meeting, and that he planned on attending. Podzic said he assumed that Cikotic had also granted Vukovic permission to attend.

13. (S) Podzic later called to tell us that one of the generals, Deputy CHOD MG Milojcic, phoned him to provide a read-out of the meeting. Podzic said that Milojcic had told him that Dodik only wanted to discuss the "lack of shoes and coats among common soldiers" and also give assurances to the

generals that the political crisis should not affect their activities. Podzic said he completely trusted "Milojicic as a friend," but did "not trust that those were Dodik's exact words."

Cikotic: Didn't Know All Would Attend the Meeting

¶4. (S) We sought clarification from Defense Minister Cikotic as to why he authorized the generals to meet with Dodik. Cikotic said that Crnadak had asked permission for himself and Milojicic to meet Dodik to discuss defense property and defense reform issues. Cikotic granted permission for this activity, but had been unaware that the other Bosnian-Serb generals had also attended the meeting.

Crnadak: No Cause for Concern

¶5. (S) We also followed up with Crnadak. Crnadak said he understood that the optics of the meeting were terrible, but claimed that the meeting had been scheduled two weeks prior, before the crisis broke, and that the purpose was to discuss defense property issues. (Note. We have spoken with Crnadak numerous times during the week, including an hour and a half meeting in his office two days ago to discuss the political situation. At no point did Crnadak tell us that he was to meet with Dodik at the end of the week. End Note.) Crnadak stated that a similar briefing had been arranged for the Federation government in the past month. Crnadak said he had received Cikotic's permission for Milojicic and himself to attend the meeting, but had not known that the other Bosnian-Serb generals would also be present. Crnadak

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provided his "complete assurance" that no political issues were discussed during the meeting, and that Dodik only sought an update on the military's current use of potentially surplus defense properties. Crnadak said Dodik also inquired about equipment shortages in the Armed Forces, and provided his own briefing on RS measures to provide assistance for retired military officers and MOD employees. Crnadak said that Dodik told him and the generals that they were doing a great job and that defense reform was a success. Dodik said that the deteriorating political climate should not impact the work of the generals and Crnadak.

Comment: Dodik Sending a Message?

¶6. (S) It is highly unusual for the uniformed military to meet with entity officials under any circumstances. Both Podzic and Federation Prime Minister Nedžad Brankovic tell us that Defense Minister Cikotic recently briefed Brankovic on defense property issues, but no military officers were present. Even if the group really only talked about defense reform, a meeting between Dodik, the senior Bosnian-Serb civilian at MOD and the only four Bosnian-Serb generals in the Armed Forces is highly irregular at best. We will watch this development closely and report further as soon as information becomes available. End Comment.

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